

E. A. Snyder

NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE

PATROL

EDMONTON TO JASPER HOUSE

ATHABASCA DISTRICT

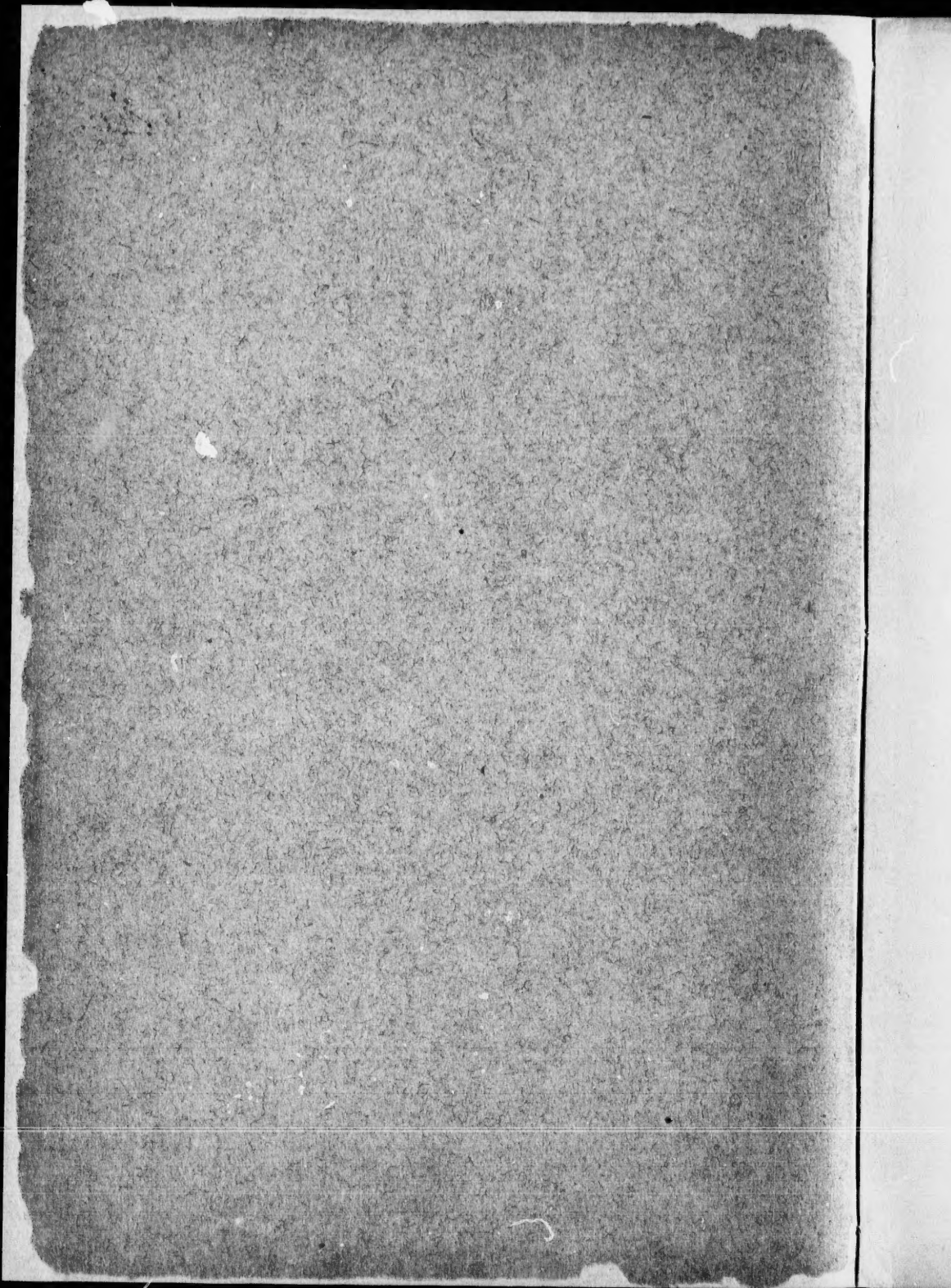
1897

BY

INSPECTOR A. E. SNYDER



OTTAWA
GOVERNMENT PRINTING BUREAU
1898



E. A. Chamberlain

PATROL REPORT

INSPECTOR A. E. SNYDER,

EDMONTON TO JASPER HOUSE, ATHABASCA DISTRICT, 1897.

NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE.

EDMONTON, 28th October, 1897.

To the Officer Commanding
"G" Division N.W.M.P.
Fort Saskatchewan.

SIR,—I have the honour to state that in compliance with orders received I left Edmonton on July 15th on a patrol to cover the following localities in the unorganized portions of the Territories, namely, Jasper House, Sturgeon Lake, Grand Prairie, Dunvegan, Peace River and Slave Lake. My patrol consisted of Constables Smith and McClelland with Special Constable W. P. Taylor as packer, and seven pack ponies and four saddle horses.

My route lay west of Edmonton via Lac St. Ann's, a lake of twelve by four miles, distant fifty miles from Edmonton, and which I reached on the 17th inst. I regret to state that near this place the packer, W. P. Taylor, had the misfortune to dislocate his shoulder by being jerked down by one of the pack horses which he was catching. The dislocation was, however, at once reduced by the two constables, and though rather painful for a time he continued his work. I lay over at Lac St. Ann's on the 18th. Lac St. Ann's is the most westerly outpost of "G" Division. The strength of this outpost is one constable. There is a half-breed settlement about the lake and three Indian reserves in the vicinity. The Hudson's Bay have a trading post under the management of Mr. T. Taylor. On the 19th I left the lake but had only journeyed one day when compelled to lay up for two owing to a very heavy rain storm which was incessant for two days and three nights and made the trails almost impassable and very trying for the horses. On the 23rd I reached Island Lake, where Pierre Grey had a trading post. This is the locality where the murder occurred a year ago and for which Kam-me-kow-gate and Charlie Joachim were sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary. When I reached there, there were no Indians about, being off on their summer meat hunt and drying berries. At that season of the year they hunt moose and bear and dry the meat for winter consumption. The hunting grounds of the Lac St. Ann's Indians lie between the McLeod River (which is a tributary of the Athabasca) on the north and the watershed of the Saskatchewan on the south, and as far west as the base of the mountains, where they hunt sheep and goats which they kill also for drying. There is one spot on the McLeod River where they slaughter sheep and goats in great numbers, the place is known as the "Big Alkali Lick." They watch the lick from hiding places till they see a number of the sheep go down, and as the lick lies in a hole, they get at the outlet, of which there is but one, and kill all that are there.

The trail from St. Ann's to the Pembina River is through heavy poplar and the travelling most difficult. The Pembina is a stream of about one hundred yards in width and usually fordable but when I crossed it was a raging torrent, owing to the recent heavy rains. Throughout this portion of the trail there are several short bad muskegs. The trail after leaving the Pembina River, traverses a country comprised alternately of burnt and green timber, green poplar and prairie, till a stream known as the Buffalo dung River is reached, when, for a long distance the trail runs through very extensive and bad muskegs and on the higher ground great quantities of fallen timber. Through here the present trail follows in part the old Moberley trail to Jasper House, built by the Government for conveying supplies during the Jasper Pass survey in the years 1873-

74. This has been a very substantially built trail, long stretches having been corduroyed, but those portions are now very dangerous and impassable, owing to the corduroying having rotted, thereby letting a horse through with great danger of breaking his legs. We had to leave the trail at these places and travel through the muskegs.

Near the Pembina River I met James Norris of Edmonton with a pack outfit, returning from mining on the McLeod River. On the 28th inst. the McLeod was reached and crossed. This river is a considerable stream of two hundred yards in width, with easy approaches. From accounts I got of it, it is very rich in gold, and is worked by the half-breeds from about Lac St. Ann's. The gold is situated differently from other gold-producing streams such as the Saskatchewan and Athabasca, it is not found distributed over the bars below high water mark as in those rivers, but in pockets in old beds above the present high water mark. Such finds as \$50.00 for two days washing and \$200.00 for seven days are reported, but are, I think, rare. There is no systematic work done, and if thoroughly prospected might turn out very rich.

Near this river I passed a hunter and prospector named Derr who, with his partner Craig, is located in the mountains near the head of the Big Smoky River. He was then returning from Edmonton where he had been to purchase his annual supply of provisions. This man complained of some depredations made on him by Miatias Delorme (of whom you have had a previous report from me), he having possessed himself of some of Derr's property. Delorme, however, I heard had left the Territories and was in British Columbia in the neighbourhood of Tete Juan Cache, as was also St. Paul his partner. Although not getting these men the fact of our having been in that part of the country and looking for them will have a very salutary effect. On 31st July I passed the winter trading post of Dan Noyes at White Mud, but which at this season of the year was abandoned. On August 2nd I reached the Athabasca River at Cache Pecotte. The territory from the watershed between the McLeod River and the Athabasca, and a long distance north and west to Henry House, is quite deserted by the Indians during the past year or two, that district being burnt and the game driven out. I never saw so bleak and barren a wilderness, the streams being barren of fish and not a sign of fur or feather among the stumps of what had once been a fine forest. The soil is principally red sand with patches of loam in low places.

I left part of outfit at Cache Pecotte and went to Jasper House, which I reached on the 3rd August. I proposed going on to the trading post of J. Swift at Henry House, and of G. Cowan on Birch Creek, but did not, as these traders were from home. I therefore returned to Cache Pecotte, crossed the Athabasca and started for Sturgeon Lake. The route I had intended to take was north from the Athabasca about thirty miles, to Pierre Grey's place on Fishing Lakes, and then north-east over a trail used by Sturgeon Lake Indians who traded at Grey's, (Grey's is now abandoned), but found that recent fires had made that route impracticable, so I had to continue due north to the Little Smoky River and then due east to form a junction with the Lac St. Ann and Sturgeon Lake trails, which made the distance considerably greater. I found the country all burnt till near the junction of the trail from Sturgeon Lake to Lac St. Ann, which is the direct road from Edmonton to Fort St. John. Before reaching this trail, which we struck on the south side of the Little Smoky, about fifty miles from Sturgeon Lake, the character of the country changed, muskegs were less frequent, the timber was all green and small prairies frequent.

All down the Little Smoky indications of large game were very numerous and few signs of any hunting. I learnt from the traders at Sturgeon Lake that that district was little hunted. Sturgeon Lake is about ten or twelve miles long by three or four miles broad. It is a nice body of water, deep with sandy shores, except small portion of the south-west end which is marshy about the narrows, where the trail crosses. The lake contains abundance of fine white fish. There are located here during the winter season, four trading posts, namely, the Hudson's Bay Company, Miles McDermott, Rivet and Larue & Picard. During the summer the Hudson's Bay Company and McDermott only are there. The country about the margin of the lake is prairie, upon which many of the Indians have built houses as winter quarters. To each of these houses a small garden is attached in which are potatoes of a very fine quality besides other garden

products; I counted upwards of forty of these houses. The Indians from here hunt south to the Buck Lakes which lie between the Little Smoky and the Athabasca, north to the junction of the Big and Little Smoky and west to the Grand Prairie. They all seem prosperous. There are no white hunters in this section, and I was informed there was absolutely no poison used in the district, neither could I learn of any traffic in liquor.

From fifty miles south of this lake, on the Little Smoky River, I travelled on the trail which is used by the present parties en route to the Yukon. This trail is good. From Sturgeon Lake there are two trails, one via Grand Prairie, which is about twenty miles longer, the other direct to Dunvegan. I expect both these trails will be used; I travelled by Grand Prairie. Sturgeon Lake is crossed at the narrows by both of these trails. The narrows are about one hundred and fifty or two hundred yards wide and not fordable. There is a trail around the north-east end of the lake, but it increases the distance by about fifteen miles, and is not advisable owing to soft ground.

From the narrows of Sturgeon Lake to Big Smoky River is two and a half days travel over a very good trail; this river is about two hundred yards wide and is never fordable. The approach on the east side is steep but not difficult; proceeding from the river the banks are not so high. About five miles of brush and timber is passed through when the Grand Prairie is reached. This is a fine stretch of prairie twenty by thirty miles, interspersed with lakes, creeks and clumps of trees, and from the top of the butte, from where the first sight is had, presents a charming scene. It is noted for the number of silver and black foxes which the Indians kill upon it. We found large numbers of prairie chickens there, but which were much wilder than I have ever known them to be in the Territories. The Hudson's Bay Company have a winter post at Bear Lake, which lies on the south-west corner of the prairie. This post was closed at the time of my visit. I, however, met the agent on the way to open it for the fall trade.

Gerome Laboucan, a half-breed from the Battle River, east of the Calgary and Edmonton trail, located last winter at Saskatoon Lake, as also some other half-breeds. The feed on the prairie is magnificent and well adapted to cattle-raising, and I am sure when a road is opened up the land will be speedily taken up for that purpose. The climate is said to be very mild and with frequent chinooks. To the north, between Grand Prairie and Spirit River, is a timbered plateau one thousand two hundred feet high, through which the Dunvegan trail runs. This trail is good.

At Spirit River is located the horse and cattle ranche lately run by the Hudson's Bay Company, but now owned by Bremner & Gunn, upon which they have about a hundred and fifty head of Polled Angus cattle and a number of horses. I saw a number of the horses raised there; they are an excellent stamp of horse for that country, where they are required for both pack and draught purposes, being low set, sturdy and active, with good bone and short backs. There is a settlement springing up along this river, there being some four or five houses owned by hunting half-breeds.

I regret to state that the day I reached the Big Smoky River, Constable Smith, while chopping wood, cut his foot very seriously. I dressed the wound as well as I was able and fixing him as comfortably as possible in a saddle, with the injured foot elevated over the horse's neck, conveyed him to Spirit River, a journey of four days. From thence to Slave Lake I had him conveyed in a waggon, from Slave Lake to Athabasca Landing by boat, and thence by trail to Edmonton. His foot is now healing rapidly. Another mishap occurred on the Big Smoky, horse reg. No. 1875, which I was riding, whilst feeding amongst some fallen timber, injured one of his forelegs so severely that I was compelled to leave him on Grand Prairie, where he will no doubt do well. I left word with the Hudson's Bay trader there where I had left him and instructed him to recover the horse and when fit to travel to send him to the N.W.M.P. Detachment at Lesser Slave Lake.

I reached Dunvegan on the 13th September, and remained there until the 16th. This was once a very important post, but is now an outpost from Slave Lake. The valley of the Peace River here is very deep and the climate said to be very mild, and it must be, judging from the magnificent crops of vegetables I saw there, tomatoes and corn are said to ripen regularly in the open. Here and at Grand Prairie the trade is chiefly done with Beaver Indians, who are the tribe from whom the Sarcee Indians are

said to be an off-shoot. They are, however, not nearly so fine in physique, being smaller in stature and very degenerate in general appearance, and said to be rapidly dying off from the effects of scrofula. They are not noted as being hunters, being unable to endure the hardships. There are computed to be not more than forty families now trading between Dunvegan and Grand Prairie.

I here learnt of a case of setting out poison, but as the parties interested were out of the district, nothing could be done. This was the only instance I could learn of in this locality of the setting out of poison, the hunters recognizing its evils, besides being afraid to handle the poison itself.

A rather interesting story was told me at Dunvegan regarding the division of the Beaver Indians, when what are now the Sarcee Indians, located at Calgary, severed from the main tribe. The story runs that about one hundred or one hundred and twenty-five years ago the whole Beaver tribe were camped on the prairies along the Big Smoky River, near Dunvegan. At that time there were two chiefs who had two sons just approaching manhood and anxious for distinction and power, and jealous of one another. A dog belonging to one of these young Indians committed a depredation in the tepee of the other. The owner of the tepee shot the dog, and was in turn shot by the dog's owner. The tribe immediately took sides with one or the other of these young men and a battle ensued; neither side gaining any advantage, the participants separated, leaving the camp standing and the dead and wounded uncared for. One body went north-west across the Peace River, where they hunted for many years, and the others struck out for the great prairies. These Indians lost complete trace of one another for many years till their descendants met on a trading expedition some thirty years ago at Edmonton, since which time an intercourse has been kept up.

From Dunvegan there are two pack trails to St. John, both of which are said to be equally good, one on the north side of the river and the other on the south, the latter trail being the more direct by a couple of days travel.

On September 16th I left Dunvegan en route to Peace River settlement, distant sixty miles, travelling on a good wagon road and over a prairie country. This road is particularly good, except at each end (leaving Dunvegan and approaching the settlement heavy grades from the river bottom to the plateau above are encountered). The settlement I reached on the night of the 17th. The landing and settlement has a population of between sixty and eighty souls, including the church missions, whites and half-breeds. There is considerable farming done here with indifferent results, owing to the drought, but this year has been an exceptionally good one and I saw some very fine samples of grain, particularly some wheat at the Roman Catholic Mission, which was as fine grain as I have ever seen. The yield per acre is small, oats not averaging more than twenty-five or thirty bushels to the acre; oats sell at \$1.50 per bushel. It apparently is only the bottoms along the river which are suitable for agriculture, the uplands being particularly droughty. Some of the farms here are irrigated; the vegetables I saw at this point were not so good as at Sturgeon Lake, Spirit River, Dunvegan or Lesser Slave Lake, at which last place the Roman Catholic Mission has an extensive garden and a magnificent crop of all kinds of the ordinary vegetables, such as are grown throughout the Territories. Along the shores of Lesser Slave Lake, I am informed, summer frosts are never known.

From Peace River settlement to Peace River Landing is a distance of about fifteen miles, over a hilly wagon road. The river at the landing is very broad, about 500 yards, and deep. Just above the landing is the confluence of the Big Smoky and Heart Rivers with the Peace, both entering from the south. There is a wagon road from the landing to Lesser Slave Lake, distance about ninety six miles. Leaving the landing, there is a heavy grade of about one and a half or two miles to the plateau above, and the balance of the road is very bad, being worn into very deep holes from traffic. Several small streams and rivers are crossed, but all are well bridged. I would consider this an almost impassable road in wet weather. While crossing over this road I detected an Indian leaving his camp fire burning. I had him before me and pointed out to him the dangers of such an act and dismissed him with a caution.

I reached the settlement at Lesser Slave Lake on the 23rd, and remained there until the 30th. While there I had several long talks with the natives who came to see

me in bodies, and seemed greatly alarmed at the advent of the police and the prospect of a wagon road being opened through their country. They are also very jealous of white trappers trespassing upon their hunting grounds and wanted them forbidden to do so. Another thing they were particularly troubled about was that they should be compelled to take treaty and live on reserves. I informed these Indians that they would not be compelled to take treaty and that their freedom would in no wise be interfered with, that the police were there more for their protection than for any interference with their ways, and so long as they obeyed the laws, the police would not trouble them, but that the police would prevent the white trappers setting out poison and fires, and the traders from trading liquor. Regarding the liquor traffic generally in the districts through which I patrolled, I am of the opinion that there is little of it, that is, trafficked with Indians, who all seem aware of its evils and have no desire for it. There is a stimulant traded by the traders, "Jamaica Ginger," I do not know whether this is classed as intoxicating liquor or not. The trade of it, however, is very limited. At the time of my stay at Lesser Slave Lake, the population, both whites and Indians, were preparing for their fall fishery, which usually begins about the 12th of October. The number of fish taken each year must be very great, as the main diet for man and dogs during the greater part of the year is fish. The Roman Catholic Mission, at their fishery last fall, put up seventeen thousand fish, and at this time of the year when the fish are full of spawn it represents a great destruction.

About the western end and southern shore of Slave Lake and also about the Buffalo Lakes, which lie to the west of Slave Lake and are connected with it by narrows are large dry marshes, which once were portions of the lake. These produce the greatest abundance of hay of an excellent quality. This hay stands in many places six feet high and as thick as it can grow. The marsh is as smooth, almost, as a cultivated field, thousands and thousands of tons could be put up with the greatest facility. This hay is not of the ordinary "Slough grass" nature, but is finer and has a head not unlike timothy. There is comparatively little grain grown here, as at Peace River Landing oats are valued at \$1.50 per bushel, and the supply is limited. At Lesser Slave Lake I left two horses in the care of the detachment, arranging with the Hudson's Bay Company for feed and stabling at \$3 per month each. These horses had been injured, one being staked in the groin, the other having caught his off hind leg between some poles in a muskeg and in a struggle to extricate himself, jammed and injured his hock severely. They were both, however, on a fair way to recovery when I left there and as they were particularly good horses, will be of great benefit to the detachment upon their recovery.

This detachment is very unfortunately situated without horses. They have a boat which is comparatively of no use to them. It can only be utilized on the big lake, and then only during calm weather, being too small for a heavy sea, and they rarely have occasion to go on the big lake. The Buffalo Lakes are not navigable even for a small boat, there not being more than three or four inches of water, consequently the balance of the patrol they must do on foot, with a heavy sand to walk through and streams to ford. I would recommend this detachment being properly equipped; they should have two saddle horses and two pack horses. Constable Phillips is a suitable man for the post, I found him to be greatly respected by the residents of this district.

If the rush to the Klondike continues in the spring, I would strongly recommend the stationing of a constable at Sturgeon Lake, also a permanent patrol being placed on the trails. I also think it would be advisable, in the absence of local justices, if it be arranged that a magistrate visit these outposts at fixed intervals. Leaving the settlement on Slave Lake, the trail which I followed to Edmonton via Fort Assiniboine, follows the north or north east shore of the narrows for about three miles to the crossing, to which point runs a wagon road. The narrows are fordable by unloaded horses, but not by packed horses or by wagons, owing to the soft nature of the bottom. The width is probably little more than one hundred yards. From here to Sandy Bay, distant about thirty miles, the trail (now a pack trail) follows the dry marsh along the lake shore. At Sandy Bay it leaves the lake, taking a south-easterly direction towards old Fort Assiniboine. I, however, overshot by several miles the point on Sandy Bay where the trail takes off; I then struck across in a southerly direction till I intercepted the trail from Sandy Bay at the crossing of the Swan River. This trail, where it runs

between Slave Lake and Fort Assiniboin, is known as "The Cattle Trail," or "The Kinesayo," and is the most direct trail from Slave Lake to Edmonton, and the best. From where I intersected this trail to Fort Assiniboine, distance about one hundred and twenty miles (at which point a wagon road is again reached), I found the trail to be the best I had yet travelled upon, running for the first part principally through small jack pines and spruce and over sandy ridges, intersected by bits of muskeg with rocky bottom, but no fallen timber whatever. During the last part the timber is heavier but open, giving good travelling. Horse feed and water are abundant.

The Athabasca River at old Fort Assiniboine is about two hundred and fifty yards in breadth and not fordable. The approaches to the river are flat, the north shore is heavily timbered but the south shore is open, with fine feed. Fifteen or twenty miles of the road from Fort Assiniboine towards Edmonton is heavily timbered, the balance prairie with bluffs. Twenty miles south of the Athabasca, Paddle River is crossed, a small stream of about one hundred feet, fordable at almost any time. Ten miles farther south the Pembina River is crossed. This is only fordable at the lowest water and is about one hundred yards wide.

The country between Athabasca and Lesser Slave Lake is evidently a great moose country, as tracks were very numerous, also cariboo tracks. Whilst crossing from Lesser Slave Lake to Fort Assiniboine, pack pony No. 7 was suddenly taken sick whilst travelling light. I pitched camp and remained with him that day and part of the next, but as he grew worse and was quite unable to travel, I was forced to abandon him. He was apparently suffering from some kidney or spinal trouble, as he had to a great extent lost the use of his hind quarters. I left him in a well sheltered place with good feed and water, and should he get better will be easily recovered. I reached Edmonton on Friday, October the 15th, having been absent just three months, and travelling in that time in the neighbourhood of fifteen hundred miles without any change of horses, and without any sore backs amongst the horses other than slight galls, which were speedily healed. This was owing, in great measure, to the careful attention given his duties by W. P. Taylor, the packer.

I made diligent inquiries regarding the condition of the Indians along the route, and found them to be in a very prosperous way. Their average trade of fur appears to be about \$300.00. One Indian had, I was informed by the Hudson's Bay agent at Sturgeon Lake, traded to the value of \$2,500.00 in one year. Of this I am, however, doubtful, or he may have traded for others besides himself. This average of \$300.00 means that besides that quantity of fur they have well provided themselves with dried meat, as they dry the flesh of almost all the animals they kill. All the Indians I saw, except the Beaver Indians at Dunvegan, were a healthy, well-clothed, well-fed looking lot.

Whilst at Slave Lake a complaint was made to me regarding the abduction of a child from the Church of England Mission by an Indian who, apparently, had no claim upon her, and who after abducting her had placed her in the Roman Catholic Mission. I inquired into the matter with the result that until the child's mother is heard from, she having placed the child at the Church of England Mission, but was now away at Dunvegan, the child should return to the Church of England Mission.

Fish.—The only points which I visited where fish are in abundance are Sturgeon Lake and Lesser Slave Lake. The fish from the former lake are the finest, but the supply is limited, and during the winter season no fish can be caught through the ice.

Timber.—On the lower stretches of the Athabasca, the Big and Little Smoky, are some small areas of very fine spruce timber. The upper reaches of these rivers are all burnt. I should say the supply of spruce timber throughout this country is limited, owing to the very extensive fires which have from time to time run over the country.

Fur.—It is very difficult to ascertain whether fur is decreasing in quantity or not, as it seems to increase in one part one year and decrease in another, and *vice versa*, and again some seasons the catch of certain kinds of fur is greater than others. It is generally admitted, however, that beaver are on the decrease.

Hay.—Lesser Slave Lake has hay in abundance. The other settlements and posts have limited quantities. There are places on the main trail at intermediate points where hay exists in considerable quantities.

Fires.—All residents of the north, while travelling, seem most careless regarding their camp fires, invariably leaving them burning, and I am surprised that more of the country is not burned. Great attention on this point should be given to the Klondikers passing through the country in the spring when everything is dry.

Police Detachments.—I would recommend detachments being stationed at the following points: Lesser Slave Lake, Sturgeon Lake and St. John's, if practicable, if not there at Dunvegan, with a flying patrol on the trails. This is in the event of the rush to the Klondike continuing. There is a trail I have hitherto neglected to mention, namely a pack trail from Lesser Slave Lake to Dunvegan, crossing the Big Smoky at the junction of it with the Little Smoky. This is a very short route making the distance between these points one-half less than the route via Peace River Landing. This trail is little used, running through heavy timber the greater part of the way, but is said to be otherwise good. The location of this trail will be seen on the accompanying map, as well as all other main trails in their approximate locality.

DISTANCES.

	Miles.
Edmonton to Jasper House	300
Jasper House to Sturgeon Lake	300
Sturgeon Lake to Dunvegan	115
Sturgeon Lake to Dunvegan (via Grand Prairie)	130
Dunvegan to St. John	125
Dunvegan to Peace River Landing	75
Peace River Landing to Slave Lake	96
Slave Lake to Fort Assiniboine	150
Fort Assiniboine to Edmonton	90

I have the honour to be, sir,

Your obedient servant,

(Sgd.) A. E. SNYDER,

Inspector.

N.B.—I regret that a series of photographs I took of points along the route were rendered useless owing to damp which got at the films. On the first part of my trip, out of thirty days there were twenty-four upon which it rained more or less.